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A TERRACOTTA SKETCH BY LORENZO Ghiberti.

[PLATE XIII.]

In the autumn of 1892, I purchased of the Fratelli Bassetti in Siena a terracotta sketch, supposed to be by Ghiberti. It was said to have been long in the possession of a Sieneſe family. Further than this I know nothing of its provenance. The sketch has every apparent indication of being an old one. Traces of coloring, now largely washed away, ſtill remain. At ſome period of its history the ſketch had fallen from its place and broken in ſeveral places, but its original fragments were carefully gathered and mounted on a ſlate ground which ſeems to have been cemented on to a wall, ſo as to prevent further injury. The ſubject of the compoſition is a portion of the group to the left in the Moſes panel of the ſecond of Ghiberti's bronze gates for the Baptiſtery of Florence. In his Second Commentary,¹ Ghiberti gives this brief notice of the compoſition:—"In the ſeventh panel is (repreſented) how Moſes received the tablets (of the law) on the mountain, and how half-way up the mountain Joſhua waits for him, and how the people are aſtoniſhed at the earthquakes, lightningſ and thunder. And how the people ſtand at the foot of the mountain in amazement."

The incidents pictured in this panel are taken from the book of Exodus, which will furniſh us a few additional details for its interpretation. To the extreme left is the Red Sea and the camp which the children of Iſrael erected before Mount Sinai. The people at the foot of the mountain may be divided into two groups: to the left is a quiet group gathered about an old man, who is addreſſing them; to the right a group in conſternation over the physical diſturbances which accompanied the giving of

¹ CARL FREY, *Vita di Lorenzo Ghiberti Scultore Fiorentino ſcritta da Giorgio Vasari*. Berlin, 1886, p. 53.

the law. For the sake of definiteness, we may name the old man Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, who had recently arrived, bringing with him Moses' wife Zipporah and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer (Ex. 18. 1-6). He is looking toward the Red Sea and seems to be saying, "Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex. 18. 10). Before him is a row of women in light and graceful pose, suggestive of the women who followed Miriam with timbrels and dances. Miriam herself is represented with a timbrel in her hand in a niche of the framework directly alongside of this group. In the foreground of the quiet group is a young warrior, symbolic of the victories already achieved against the Egyptians and against Amalek. Alongside of the warrior is Zipporah, with her two children.

In the excited group to the right is a woman with a frightened child. She is perhaps the Ethiopian woman, whom Moses had made his wife, much to the dissatisfaction of his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron (Numbers, 12. 1). About her are the elders and people, terrified by the "thunders and lightnings," and the "voice of the trumpet exceeding loud" (Ex. 19. 16). Above is figured Jehovah in the midst of angels, handing the two tables of the law to Moses, who receives them on the top of the mount. Below him, prostrate on the ground, is Joshua, who accompanied him (Ex. 24. 13). Aaron is perhaps to be recognized in the centre of the excited group, and is again represented, with the sacrificial flame in his hand, in a niche of the frame to the right of this panel.

In comparing the terracotta with the bronze, I have been led to believe the former to be a preliminary sketch by Ghiberti, for the following reasons:

1. It is not an exact copy of the group in the bronze panel, and its agreements and differences may be best explained on the supposition that it is a preliminary sketch. The principal figures, which we have named Jethro, the warrior, and Zipporah, appear to have been considered by Ghiberti as successful enough to be reproduced with but slight variations in the bronze. These variations, however, are important. The final sketch for the entire

panel, made in wax, contained a more elaborate composition ; consequently the three individuals we have named are drawn more closely together and thus separated from the line of women to the left. Jethro, in the bronze, is placed more nearly behind the warrior ; the warrior and Zipporah are also drawn closer together. We may observe another important difference, which may be best explained on the same hypothesis. In the final model Ghiberti apparently determined to separate more completely the quiet group on the left from the agitated group on the right. Consequently one of Zipporah's children is removed and finds his place by the side of the figure we have called the Ethiopian woman. As a consequence of this separation, the eye is led through an unobstructed passage between the groups and more readily seizes the principal theme upon the summit of the mountain. The artist, however, will not take away from Zipporah her two sons, and so replaces the lost child by another, who serves better the purpose of economy of space.

There are several other figures of which more than a reminiscence is preserved in the bronze. The first figure to the left on the terracotta is reproduced in similar attitude, but with more grace. The old woman next to her is retained also, and is adapted by a change of attitude to the enlarged composition. The man with a turban is not forgotten. There was no room for his face, but his turban remains, and in the same relative position. The woman to the right of Zipporah, with hands folded in prayer, is also preserved, but thrown more into the background. There are two other heads, that of a middle-aged man and of a youth, who appear also in the bronze ; but in general the artist seems to have developed the idea of presenting a larger mass of people, and this has led him to suppress the representation of several heads and to substitute in their stead an approaching throng, which could be indicated with greater ease and with improved perspective by summarily indicating only the crowns of their heads. In the terracotta sketch, between the warrior and Zipporah is a woman ; in the finished bronze a male figure is substituted, which has the advantage of bringing out the figure of Zipporah in stronger contrast.

These considerations seem to show that the variations in composition between the terracotta and the bronze are not such changes as would be likely to occur at the hands of a copyist, but are purposeful modifications by means of which the composition of the terracotta sketch becomes adapted to its new surroundings in the more complex composition of the bronze panel.

2. If we compare the style of the terracotta relief with that of the bronze, the preliminary character of the former will be still more evident.

The terracotta sketch is composed in a thoroughly plastic manner. The figures in the background were first fashioned and those in the foreground applied later. This is evident from the fact that several of the heads in the background are modelled with great care, as could only have been done when the artist was free to work without the impediment of the figures in the foreground. The face and breast of the warrior show that this figure also was modelled before being put in place. Now this method of plastic composition is not such as is likely to have occurred in the case of a copy from the bronze. Not only would a copyist have been likely to have reproduced Ghiberti's figures more exactly; he also would have copied Ghiberti's perspective and thus saved himself considerable unnecessary labor.

The terracotta group seems to have been modelled with special reference to the characterization of the different figures. There is here a greater variety of individual characters than in the bronze itself. This individualization is purposely sacrificed in the bronze for the sake of the mass, and the entire composition modified by reason of the enlarged perspective.

If we consider the mode of composition employed in the bronze gates, we find as many as thirty-one distinct events portrayed. In only one panel, that which represents the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, do we find pictured a single event; in the rest there are two, three, four, and in the Jacob and Esau panel, as many as six different actions. The style of composition makes it, therefore, not unlikely that Ghiberti made studies for the minor compositions first, and then combined them in the larger units. This must, at least, be admitted in the case of the Abraham panel, which includes his earlier composi-

tion of the Sacrifice of Isaac; and if in this case, why not in the rest?

3. Having shown the preliminary character of the sketch, it follows almost immediately that it must be by the hand of Ghiberti himself. In the case of the first Baptistery gates, in which the coöperation of other artists was relied upon to a greater extent, the contract specifically demanded that Ghiberti with his own hand should execute the figures, trees, and such details as the hair, the nudes, &c.² The second gates seem to have been even more exclusively the work of Ghiberti himself.³ He was assisted by his son Vettorino and by Michelozzo; but the mannerism of Vettorino, as seen in the frame-work of Andrea Pisano's gates, and the style of Michelozzo, as seen in his work in association with Donatello, are not to be detected in our terracotta. This is evidently the work of a master hand, as may be judged from the individuality and graceful beauty of the heads and the naturalistic treatment of the drapery. Here and there, I am free to admit, there is a laxity in the pose of certain figures, in the perspective, in the swing of the drapery, that falls short of Ghiberti's best work; but the variation does not seem to be sufficiently strong to compel a different attribution. It is more easily explained by the supposition that the terracotta is a preliminary sketch. Let me call attention to a slight difference between the warrior of the terracotta and the same figure in the bronze. In the terracotta his cloak has a broad fringe and the back of his corselet is differently ornamented. But the variations are strictly within the limits of Ghiberti's own work. The prototype of this figure may be seen on Ghiberti's first gates in the panel of Pilate Washing his Hands. Here and in many other figures on the first gates, and in the panels of the font in the Baptistery at Siena as well, Ghiberti shows a fondness for ornamenting the edges of his draperies. The peculiar type of ornament upon the warrior's back may also be found in the base of Pilate's throne, and again upon the borders of the second gates.

It may be objected that the models for the second gates were in wax, and not in terracotta. A reference to the contract will

² MÜNTZ, *Les Archives des Arts*, pp. 15, 16.

³ MÜNTZ, *Archives des Arts*, pp. 19-21.

certainly show that wax models were used for the figures, heads, animals and ornamentation of the borders and cornices; and it may be admitted that the panel reliefs were probably cast in accordance with the same methods. But this in no way prevents our supposing that preliminary sketches may have been made in clay, since Ghiberti himself tells us in his Second Commentary that he made many sketches in this material.⁴ The terracotta sketch is somewhat larger than the original;⁵ this permitted greater freedom in modelling.

The discovery of this sketch has an important bearing on the estimate to be made of Ghiberti's methods. It would seem to indicate that his preliminary sketches were not made upon paper, but in plastic fashion in clay. In this manner he reached a thoroughly sculptural perspective, to be distinguished from that of the painter, and which should be a perpetual object-lesson to those who would force all relief sculpture into flat planes.

ALLAN MARQUAND.

⁴ CARL FREY, *op. cit.*, *Ancora a molti pictori e scultori et statuarii o (ho) fatto grandissimi honori ne loro lauorii fatto moltissimi prouedimenti di cera e di creta e a pittori disegnato moltissime cose; etiando chi auesse auute appare (a fare) figure grandi fuori dela naturale forma (ho io) dato le regole a condurle con perfetta misura.*

⁵ The figure of the warrior in the terracotta is nine and a quarter inches high; in the bronze it is only four and a half inches.



GROUP FROM THE MOSES PANEL OF Ghiberti's SECOND BAPTISTERY GATES.



TERRACOTTA SKETCH FOR THE SAME.